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Camp TaPaWingo celebrates 40 years

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MISHICOT – When 4-H Camp TaPaWingo began in 1962, it was just a red barn turned into a lodge.

Now as the camp prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary, it has grown to include a new lodge called the Rensink Lodge as well as the Buchholz Nature Center, the Wagner Arts Building, 10 cabins for campers, two cabins for staff members and one being used for storage, according to Marie Steeber, camp director.

The camp also has an arboretum featuring trees donated by the governors of the other 49 states.

Camp TaPaWingo is owned and operated by the Manitowoc County 4-H Leaders Association, but its use is not limited to those involved in 4-H.

Steeber estimated that 80 percent of the children participating in summer camp are not 4-H members.

In addition, other organizations and family groups may rent the facilities year-round. The lodge already is booked every weekend through next spring except the weekend before Thanksgiving, Steeber said.

"I have bookings into fall of 2004 already," she said.

Steeber has been involved with Camp TaPaWingo for many years – first as a camper, then as a counselor and summer staff member, and now as director for the past two years.

"The essence of camp really hasn't changed," she said. "You feel like you're far away from home when you are here but you aren't really."

In reality, the camp is just a few miles north of Mishicot at 915 W. TaPaWingo Road, off Highway B.

Steeber said the activities have stayed pretty much the same over the years: arts and crafts, nature studies, recreation, skits, scavenger hunts and campfires. Volleyball, tennis and basketball also are available. The East Twin River flows through the property, but it's too shallow for swimming.

The staff tries to include "things that are educational but without seeming like they are," she said.

For instance, campers this summer learned about solar power and then made cookies using solar ovens.

They also get a chance to experience more primitive camping by spending one night sleeping in tents in the woods and cooking their meals over an open fire.

Steeber said she's noticed that when young people come to camp they seem to feel free to be themselves rather than being influenced by peer pressure.

"All those barriers seem to break down," she said. "And I don't know why but it's kind of a neat thing."

Steeber, whose 7-year-old son, Michael, has attended camp the past two summers, said it offers a great opportunity to learn about nature, and "it's just a lot of fun. The kids have a great time."

In addition, it often leads to being a counselor when they're teenagers, which she called "a really good resume-builder.

"The counselor thing is a great leadership skill for the kids," she said.

Being a counselor is a volunteer position open to students who are at least 15 years old.

Summer camp is divided according to age groups: a three-day session for 5- to 8-year-olds and one-week sessions for 8- to 10-year-olds, 9- to 12-year-olds and 11- to 14-year-olds.

There's also a special week-long hunter safety camp for ages 12 and up. Campers can earn a hunter safety certificate, which is needed to obtain a hunting license.

A full week of summer camp costs $135. Hunter safety camp is $145 because it lasts a day longer, Steeber said. The three-day camp for the younger children is $85.

There's also a winter camp one weekend each January for

See **TaPaWingo**, A-2



Bob Ventre/LSC

A footbridge connects the part of Camp TaPaWingo that has the girls' cabins, main lodge and nature center with the portion that has the boys' cabins and arts and crafts building.



Bob Ventre/LSC



ABOVE: Marie Steeber, director of Camp TaPaWingo, stands in front of the Rensink Lodge. The building is named for Reg Rensink who was the county's 4-H agent 40 years ago when the camp was started. Steeber said it was Rensink and some 4-H leaders who got the project going. **RIGHT:** Jay Ney is an active volunteer at Camp TaPaWingo. He puts in about 30 hours per week doing general maintenance like lawn care, gardening and snow removal.

Celebration planned for Saturday

MISHICOT – Camp TaPaWingo is celebrating its 40th anniversary with a Helping Hands Event from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

Area residents are invited to tour the grounds and see what has changed since they were there last – or visit the camp for the first time.

Many activities are planned, including dog agility demonstrations, kids' games and camp history presentations. Food and refreshments will be sold inside the lodge.

A live auction will begin at 10 a.m. and will include signed and numbered Packer prints, building materials, and more. In addition, raffle tickets will be on sale the day of the event. Price is $1 per ticket or six for $5. The raffle drawing will be held at 2:45 p.m.

All proceeds will support camp operations.

The event is called Helping Hands because the hope is that some of the visitors will get interested in the camp and decide to volunteer their time to help in various ways, such as with maintenance or fundraisers, according to camp director Mary Steeber. In addition, the workers there that day will be volunteers.

Camp TaPaWingo – a Native American word meaning "place of joy and happiness" – is located three miles north of Mishicot. Visitors should take Highway B out of Mishicot, turn left on TaPaWingo Road and watch for signs.